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ABSTRACT

This paper examines Breaking Ranks, a proposal for school reform and restructuring intended to improve the effectiveness of America's high schools. The review drew upon memo writing, a personal interview with an administrator utilizing the Breaking Ranks blueprint, a review of periodicals and books on Breaking Ranks and on school restructuring, a synthesis of data collected from school-restructuring studies, and a comparison of the literature of high-school restructuring efforts. The report discusses: (1) the adoption of Breaking Ranks in one high school and how this reform effort influenced professional culture; (2) the alignment among program offerings, pedagogy, and curriculum; (3) and leadership. Findings indicate that Breaking Ranks and other reform programs all focus on student achievement and visionary leadership that is collaborative and has the capacity to involve others. Breaking Ranks, like other school-restructuring movements, also exhibits some weaknesses: recommendations are conceptual in design and not operational, so no specific or coherent plan exists; costs and the allocation of resources for implementation are not addressed; tracking is difficult because everything must be sorted, discussed, and embodied in teacher actions before it reaches the student; data supporting change initiatives are not defined; and the basic systemic structure of the school does not change. (Contains 20 references.) (RJM)

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BREAKING RANKS: A HIGH SCHOOL RESTRUCTURING INITIATIVE

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Abstract

Researchers identify a number of factors that are important for school restructuring. Liberman, Houston, and Copper, (1998), Walsey, Hampel, and Clark, (1997), Sizer, (1996) and Middleton, Smith, and Williams, (1993) suggest that advancement in schools results from the development of a professional culture in which teachers focus on gains in student achievement. Other researchers assert that alignment between programs, pedagogy, and curriculum is the key component in the restructuring process (Steinberg, 1998; Jennings, 1997). Lambert (1998), NASSP (1991), Tewel, (1995) assert that leadership which is collaborative and focused on student outcomes is the beginning point for restructuring. Stringfield, Ross and Smith (1996), Tewel, (1995), Hammond, Ancess and Falk (1995), and Cawelti, (1994) add that the design of the American high school lessens the ability of administrators to implement change.

This research examines Breaking Ranks, a proposal for school reform and restructuring that puts forth recommendations to improve the effectiveness of the American high school. In particular, the perspective of the building principal is examined along with descriptions regarding how Breaking Ranks was defined and implemented in a public high school in the Southwest. These perceptions and descriptions are compared with discussions developed by experts on school restructuring and reform to understand how efforts to implement Breaking Ranks were supported and possibly hampered by different school factors.

Definitions

For the purposes of this study restructuring is defined as; 1) the process of institutionalizing essential new beliefs and values in the school mission, structure, and process (Breaking Ranks, 1996), and 2) the decentralizing of authority that is devolving authority from the state level to the district, from the district to the school building, and

from building administrators to teachers, pushing decision making down to the lowest appropriate level in the system or school (Tewel, 1995). It is directed at the foundation of the high school, and viewed as a long term systemic change espousing the philosophy that all students can and must learn at higher levels (Sheaner, 1992). Restructuring involves designing fundamental changes in the expectations, content, and learning for a curriculum appropriate to tomorrow's world (Cawelti, 1994).

Social scientist (Mirel, 1993; Nelson, 1988; Peterson, 1985), view school reform and restructuring at a macro level and suggest that group conflict in the areas of governance, politics and the allocation of resources inhibit the American high school form fulfilling its institutional purposes. These scientist assert that the purposes of schools are: 1) helping all young people pose and solve challenging problems, 2) defining and imparting the knowledge and learning of skills that students need to lead productive adult lives, 3) encouraging exploration of the values which embody a democratic society.

Introduction

Since the turn of the century, American socio-political and economic forces have transformed the common school into an urban education system influenced by a mix of the philosophy of social Darwinism, scientific management principles and capitalism. During this period the nation witnessed an increase in the amount of information about teaching, learning, and human motivation; as well as the largest transfer of worker productivity into wealth. It also witnessed the establishment of an American elite class.

For the most part, American high school in the period researched in a study of Breaking Ranks are considered as large, impersonal social institutions effectively preparing small select groups of students and undeserving a vast population of minority and disadvantaged students. They are perceived by society as needing to become smaller, more intimate, and better connected to other schools and the community. Most high schools however remain

basically unchanged with subject matter organized and presented around 40-50 minute periods; even though new units and topics have been added.

The time modern youth spend in school encompasses some of the most difficult and potentially rewarding periods for physical, cognitive, and social growth and yet there is mounting evidence that high schools as they are now conceived are not meeting the academic or developmental needs of most young people.

Inherent in these views is the notion that the basic systemic structure of the high schools needs to be reformed/restructured by focusing more consistently on intellectual development, and by taking greater responsibility for every child's' achievement and success.

At the same time, there is a fundamental disagreement among educators and the public at large about the purposes of high school. What is it aim, and who should be educated ? What results should it produce ? Should the first two years of high school differ fundamentally from the final two years ? And what kinds of changes should the high school be making to prepare students for a different and changing world. These are just some of the questions that are symptomatic of the need to restructure high schools as asserted by Breaking Ranks and other reform initiatives.

Methodology

The steps taken in this research assignment involved; memo writing, conducting a personal interview with an administrator utilizing the Breaking Ranks blueprint, review of current periodicals and books on Breaking Ranks and school restructuring, synthesizing data collected from school restructuring studies, comparing and contrasting the literature of high school restructuring efforts and determining the implications for leadership.

The interview of the former high school administrator provided a basic understanding for how the philosophy of Breaking Ranks was interpreted, practiced and its implications for high school restructuring coinciding with the opening of a new high school.

The review of the literature identified key structural components for implementing high school restructuring, effective strategies and barriers for effective leadership. The synthesis of data provided data required to analyze the philosophy of Breaking Ranks and other school restructuring and reform movements.

Breaking Ranks

Breaking Ranks was a two year collaborative study which provided a philosophical foundation and vision of a learning environment, commissioned by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. The study conducted by the National Association of Secondary Schools Principals (NASSP) examined the key environmental factors essential to reform the American high school. Published in 1996, the report as described is the first systematic examination of the American high school since "High School: A Report on Secondary Education in America" was completed in 1983. Conclusions drawn from this study included eighty recommendations and a blueprint for making the modern school operate. The major theme of the report suggested that the high school of the 21st century needed to be more student-centered and above all much more personalized in programs, support services and intellectual rigor (NASSP, 1996).

The NASSP panel consisting of effective practicing principals, teachers, students, central office administrators, college professors and one Carnegie staff person authored Breaking Ranks. The panel focused on what was best for the education of the country's teenagers as they approach adulthood and developed six major guidelines. The guidelines were defined as: 1) a quality education was dependent on personalizing the high school experience for students, 2) coherency was required in the education program, 3) time needed to organized differently, 4) using technology at every opportune point, 5) revitalizing professional education of teachers and administrators, and 6) enhancing leadership at every level.

The report hypothesized nine fundamental functions for the modern American high school as:

1) learning communities with expectations for every student to demonstrate academic achievement,

2) transitional experiences getting each student ready for life and participation in a capitalist society,

3) providing multiple options,

4) preparing students to become life-long learners

5) providing a underpinning for good citizenship and full participation in a democratic society,

6) assisting in the personal development of young people as social beings beyond academics,

7) laying a foundation for students in a technological society

8) equipping students for a world of interdependency and diversity

9) advocating for young people.

Specific recommendations were presented in 13 different chapters and they touched on the following areas; curriculum, instructional strategies, school environment, technology, organization of time, assessment and accountability, professional development, diversity, governance, resources, ties to higher education, relationships, and leadership.

Breaking Ranks - Desert Mountain High School (DMHS)

The implementation of "Breaking Ranks" in a newly opened high school is discussed in the following section. The discussion includes the perspective of the former administrator of a local high school implementing Breaking Ranks and school restructuring activities based on recommendations suggested by the 1996 National Association of Secondary School Principals report and the Scottsdale HSD 2001 High School report.

School reform at the new school was designed to occur in a sequential manner and consisted of five elements or planes. The Entry Plane focused on technology, communications, research and reasoning, and self esteem/wellness. The Learning Path integrated learning in English, mathematics, science, history, geography, foreign language and social responsibility. The Enrichment Strand allowed for exploration to meet individual needs. The Exit Portals required students to demonstrate mastery and synthesis of their learning; and Lifelong learning encompassed a community of High School 2001.

High school reform at Desert Mountain High School resulted from school reform efforts promoted by the superintendent. A task force consisting of forty two parents, community members and leaders, educators, business representatives, and students set out to develop a vision for what a high school education should be by the year 2001. The findings were presented in a district document entitled, "Design for a New Generation of American Schools: High School 2001.

The major goal of the task force was to develop a philosophy for designing and implementing a high school curriculum which would develop responsible citizens by providing an enriched and integrated core of knowledge and experiences which promoted inquiry, risk taking, skillful decision making, effective communication, cultural appreciation, and the joy of learning.

From this goal, four qualities were identified as representative of High School 2001 including: 1) The school will focus on the individual student who will have a learning plan designed by the student, parents, teachers, and counselors. This plan will be based upon the student's skills, interest, accomplishments, and needs.

2) The learning environment will reflect a comfortable facility which provides students with access to the latest technology, interaction with community programs, flexibility in learning experiences and a global perspective of life.

3) The curriculum will reflect the best teaching strategies, include programs to develop self esteem and self discovery, provide job skills and community service opportunities, and foster an appreciation for the cultural diversity of the world.

4) Individual academic excellence is achievable by all learners, and each learner s should be taught the strategies for continued learning throughout life.

Based on the recommendations for the High School 2001 project it was determined that the optimal site for implementing the high school of the future embedded with the philosophy of Breaking Ranks was the new high school projected for the northeastern area of the school district; Desert Mountain High School.

Desert Mountain HS is a four year old state of the art comprising 389,000 square foot facility financed in 1987 and 1992 with voter approved bonds. The school received funding through an inter governmental agreement (IGA) with the city of Scottsdale which provided land and a library.

The school is one of five high schools in the district and sits on property which serves the newer northern area of the city. The campus revolves around a centrally located Community Research Center which is a shared facility that houses the city and school library, media services, a state of the art designed middle school and is fronted by courtyard concert areas. It also has a curriculum which is aligned and articulated with the feeder middle school.

The administrative team of Desert Mountain HS was lead by a seasoned administrator acknowledged in the district as a change agent who had successfully restructured a middle school level using the 1984 Carnegie report as a blueprint. She was chosen by the community because of her compatibility with the school restructuring design concepts, the strategic plan for High School 2001 and the strategic plan for the Scottsdale Unified School District. In addition, she had demonstrated leadership in shared decision making, integrated curriculum and world class standards. The assignment was taken recognizing

the potential for difficulty involved with changing a sacred institution; the American high school. She also assumed all stakeholder groups supported the restructuring philosophy of the districts "Blue Ribbon" report which called for: 1) accelerating the HS 2001 planning into reality, 2) redesigning a high school program which was based on the skills and abilities students will need to be productive and responsible citizens in the 21st century.

A design team was deemed a necessary component for developing a culture for a new school in a restructuring environment and therefore one of the first task for the new administrator. Since team composition was important a clinical process for selecting candidates was established. The process involved interviewing 35 teachers who each provided a portfolio, a video and interviews with teams consisting of 4-6 parents, administrators and various central office administrators. The team selected included six teachers, three administrators and central office personnel including; the director of staff development, the director of curriculum, and the director of community relations.

After its establishment, the design team developed a school initiative based on an investigation of the best practices in the following areas: 1) curricula experiences based on brain compatible learning through integrated thematic instruction, 2) school restructuring and reform initiatives in recognized progressive secondary schools in Kentucky, Colorado and California, 3) site based decision models, and 5) staff development.

The staff development activities were designed to create an environment for learning that was more personal, stable, and supportive and bridged the gap between the empirical and the normative.

The specific school goals were to develop within all students the ability to meet world class standards in the areas of English, mathematics, science, history, and geography and enable students to become self-directed learners, problem solvers, collaborative leaders, complex thinkers, contributors, quality producers, and effective communicators

The high school was designed to incorporate the goals of high school 2001 and be distinctively different through implementation of the following strategies:

1) an advisory program which paired individual students with a faculty advisor for the time they are in high school. This advisor is the student's advocate and mentor and helps the student acclimate to the school and whose main goal is assist the student prepare for the years after high school.

2) block scheduling which taught classes in 90 minute blocks of time, permitted students to reduced student classes per semester and reduced teacher loads per semester.

3) a honors distinction program which offered students the opportunity to contract for honors work in a regular classroom.

The school opened in August 1995 under an organization for 1000+ freshmen and sophomore students only; however immediately prior to opening; the local school board approved admission of juniors. An additional 200 students moved into the area over the summer and registered for classes over the first weeks of the academic semester. Immediately problems in the restructuring began to surface in the new school when management of the registration system failed to produce schedules for the student population.

The school opened with a staff primarily (75%) composed of probationary or non-tenured and amid high expectations of becoming the model community school. The first year student population consisted of students offered a fresh start and defined as leaders (20%) or at-risk (60%) by the administration.

The first year was a growing period and chaotic as various community groups abandoned the district's High School 2001 recommendations, questioned the validity of block scheduling and the honors distinction program. Teacher groups failed to embrace the restructuring effort, rejected the advisory program and grieved additional student contacts a violation of the professional agreement.

The second year the transfer of 150 high achieving middle school students to the more traditional curriculum of a neighboring district high school and heightened conflict among stakeholder groups concerning the integrity of the honors distinction program, the advisory program and viability of the advisory program. The school enrollment increased to 2300 and stakeholder groups began a more focused attack against local leadership because; 1) they were unable to produce achievement data, 2) they lost large number of high achieving students, 3) accurate student schedules could not be produced, 4) program credibility was lost when design team members opted for reassignment, 5) political forces began to organize for a return to a traditional school.

By the time that school opened in August 1997, 2500 students were enrolled in a school without adequate management of the registration system, whose advisory program had been eliminated and had introduced an International Baccalaureate (IB) program to satisfy stakeholders groups promoting segregated classes and a traditional school program. At the end of the first semester of the 97-98 academic year and after attempting to restructure the modern American high school; the Breaking Ranks administrator was removed from her position.

In the literature, Breaking Ranks is linked with other reform issues including; school restructuring, school management and organization, educational change, and the aims and objectives of secondary education to name a few. The focus of this literature review was directed toward identifying the salient factors for restructuring the traditional American high school. In an examination of the literature I also discovered the research of the Coalition of Essential Schools and effective school reformers and small school reformers.

Professional Culture

Research suggests that developing a professional culture, a strong teacher student relationship focused on achievement, program and service alignment, and leadership, and barriers as key factors Developing a professional school culture according to Houston,

(1998) Cooper, (1998) Walsey, Hampel and Clark, (1997), and Sizer, (1996) assert that culture as the major factor for transforming the American high school into a personalized, family like environment focused on student achievement for all children.

Houston's (1998) research suggest that the culture of secondary schools as critical for education becoming a normative enterprise which view students as workers; engaged as active learners in an environment which values curriculum, and whose teaching style is focused on student achievement.

The research presented suggest that school reform and restructuring occurs in three critical phases; organizational, relational and psychological and is dependent upon structural supports provided by teacher education and teacher evaluation.

In the organizational phase school leadership examines strategic plans and vision statements, reviews how time is organized, evaluates communication channels, and fosters flexibility in teaching and learning. When restructuring occurs in this area school schedules are reviewed to in order to determine how best to allow for curriculum and instruction to focus on depth versus breath. Changes in staffing patterns which encourage collaboration and personalization, common lunch and planning periods and reduced student ratios are also introduced in the organizational phase.

In the relational phase administrative leadership places emphasis on each student being viewed as an unique individual. This is designed to encourage personalization and engagement by teachers and students as learners, discover the students interest and abilities, and to advocate multiple assessment instruments.

In the psychological phase administrative leadership focuses on personalizing teacher relationships and the development of a professional staff capable of self assessing and self correcting. It involves acquiring a coherence and consensus about institutional and professional aims, constructive confrontation of able teachers and willing pupils, making judgments about professional practice, and is an exercise in leadership collaboration. This

phase is the result of careful recruitment and evaluation of teaching and a major administrative responsibility.

Cooper (1998), suggest that school reform is difficult unless a professional culture with a student-centered focus exist. The research findings encourage administrative leadership adoption of a medical model for improving relationships with stakeholder groups as well developing a school culture. The researcher argues for the medical because it has a systematic process for developing an individual treatment plan which includes; diagnosis which commences with a thorough history, consultation of prior treatments, assessment instruments that are standardized and universal examination protocols. He argues against the higher education model which exists in many traditional American high schools because the model de-emphasizes collaboration and resists demonstration, observation and evaluation.

Coopers' (1998), research also suggested that school culture is determined primarily through the relationship established between the child and the teacher. The findings assert that the relationship is more comparable to family ecologies rather than professional ideologies or institutional models. It also implied that teacher satisfaction is derived from the fulfillment of positive relationships with children and the sense of efficacy drawn from helping children grow and succeed.

Walsey, Hampel and Clark (1997) researched seven schools restructuring based on the "nine common principles" developed by the Coalition of Essential Schools. The principles were directed at reforming schools and included: focus, simple goals, universal goals, personalization, student as worker, diploma by exhibition, positive staff attitudes, and budget. The researchers hypothesized that restructuring requires cultural needs to be first conceptualized by teachers and administrators. Once the hegemony or culture has been established by teachers, administrators and stakeholders; they will bring the their ideas to bear on students through strategies, projects or other concrete changes in their work; resulting in a paradigm shift.

Their research asserts that schools and teenagers are the result of adults seeing kids en mass rather than as individuals and attributes calls for secure environments, tougher standards, more test, and the present public cries for reform and restructuring as the latest manifestation of the generation gap.

They further argue that to achieve the essential connection between reform efforts and student performance requires developing commitments to the evolution and maintenance of four key connections; repertoire and routine, caring and expectations, innovation and rigor, small scale and civil discourse.

In terms of commitments, the study identifies a commitment to a philosophy which demands each school to assume responsibility for its own design work and philosophical underpinning; as well as commitments to: bias free schools, teacher growth, and providing evidence of growth as important cultural factors.

Sizer, (1996) founder of the Coalition of Essential Schools movement views culture as a philosophy based on; 1) personalizing both teaching and learning to the maximum feasible extent, and 2) staffs of schools perceiving themselves as generalist first with multiple obligations (teacher-counselor-manager) and a sense of commitment to the entire school.

The research established the link between authentic instruction and increased intellectual capacity of students. They discovered that the most important factor in a schools organizational capacity is the presence of a strong professional community. Further, a professional community was defined as an environment where teachers pursue a clear and shared purpose for all students' learning, engage in collaborative work to achieve that purpose and take collective responsibility for student learning according to Sizer (1996).

Finally, effective school researchers (Middleton, Smith, Williams, 1993), present evidence which rejects the work of Coleman (1966) and his colleague who concluded that family, socio-economic status, and related variable are responsible for student

achievement; by suggesting a strong professional culture as a condition in schools exhibiting significant gains in student achievement within all subgroups of students. They base their analysis on the seven characteristics of effective school; 1) strong instructional leadership at the building level, 2) clear and focused academic mission, 3) high expectations for students and staff, 4) sufficient opportunities for learning, 5) frequent monitoring of student progress, 6) extensive parental development, and 7) safe and clean learning environments.

Program Alignment

The second essential component evident in schools implementing school reform is the alignment between program offerings, pedagogy and curriculum.

Steinberg (1998), a proponent of school to work programs recognizes that teachers have the greatest impact on the culture and climate of schools. The research from her perspective suggest that school to work programs as the essential link for connecting pedagogy, and curriculum. The research also suggest a focus on school to work programs as a point of entry for teachers looking at a range of issues to make the learning process come alive. The research further asserts that recognizing teachers as learners encourages their acceptance of new approaches, engages them as learners and models life long learning for students.

The research hypothesizes that the best strategy for engaging teachers and the development of a professional culture is through the adoption of a design teams; bottom up driven organizations with teachers as the engaged learner. The design team model encourages collaboration between teaches, involves active ongoing learning by teachers, builds interdependence, and creates new norms of practice. The model rejects the traditional training model because it focuses on techniques and skills, utilizes a top down approach, views teachers as recipients, and is closed door.

Stienberg (1998) adds that pedagogy alignment between curriculum and programs occur when the following conditions exist; 1) programs are project based, 2) experiential learning is molded by teachers, 3) curriculum activities link students and communities, and 4) when leadership is able to acquire funding.

Constructivist (Jennings, Drake, Crowell and Caine, 1997) researchers submit that integrative education is the mechanism for aligning pedagogy with instruction and programs. They define integrative education as education which promotes learning and teaching in non fragmented ways that embraces holism, complexity, and connects and propose that knowledge and meaning are constructed by the learner through interaction with others. Jennings (1997) rejects the common emphasis placed on transmitted knowledge and asserts that integrative education embraces the links between academic departments. Crowell and Cain, (1998) assert that restructuring results from the collective community of teachers, staff, administrators, and students who are allowed to give their work, questions, and creative ideas. They suggest that restructuring requires a total staff connection to a unity of purpose which may be open to redefinition.

Clark (1998) proposes three different orientations (traditional model, Constructivist model, transformation model) for determining the relationship between teacher and learner and asserts the goals of education (personal growth and social change) are best satisfied by the transformational model. She explains that the transformational model focuses on higher order life skills (e.g., attitudes, intentions, values such as perseverance, caring, concern for others, flexibility, and social responsibility), is inclusive, includes the content and skills contained in traditional and Constructivist models, recognizes intuition as the key elements for aligning pedagogy with curriculum and programs.

Jones (1998), asserts that most successful schools encourage their staffs to work on curriculum instruction programs which are designed as whole school curriculums because they promote learning across grades, between classes, and even pull out instruction. The research also suggest that whole school curriculums developed by teachers are usually

more rigorous, include more writing, application, and problem solving, and focus teachers on achievement goals.

Cawelti (1994) suggest an imbalance in the school reform efforts because most programs are directed at the academic preparation of college bound students at the expense of those graduates not going on to college. The research further asserts that school restructuring is unlikely to occur when the curriculum is allowed to perpetuate the ambivalence about the need to help prepare students for transition to the competitive world of work.

Leadership

The principal position in schools restructuring represents the starting point for any school improvement because they establish the climate for change around several major themes: 1) defining and sustaining the purpose for change, 2) developing and nurturing community, and 3) fostering personal and organizational growth. (NASSP, 1991).

Breaking Ranks suggest that leadership within schools attempting to restructuring the principal to play a transformational role display traits that are similar to those of individuals leading major corporations. The findings maintain that the common traits of principals and CEO's are:

* Articulation of a clear vision, charisma, and decisive leadership
* Ability to change the old culture in their organizations
* Tackling multiple problems simultaneously
* Changing the evaluation and reward system
* Accountability and the ability to maintain support for their plans.

Breaking Ranks further asserts that leadership must diffuse itself throughout the school community and restructuring cannot prevail unless it draws on the strengths of teachers and others associated with the high school.

Tewel (1996), asserts that the role of an administrator is changing due to the influences of various environmental factors including: parental choice, shared decision making, teacher empowerment, site based management, and budget and policy decision making. Tewel further asserts that administrative leadership in restructuring school environments requires an understanding of traditional leadership models and an ability to integrate components of the transformational leadership model (e.g., catalyst and enabler).

Tewel hypothesizes that there are three major roles for the principal functioning as a transformational leader; 1) working with others to transform into one that is effective for those who work and learn within it, 2) fostering a sense of trust and security among the different constituent groups, so that they can undertake the task of challenging the status quo. and 3) developing a compelling vision that inspires others to join.

Lambert (1998), suggest that teacher participation is central to restructuring efforts and that many restructuring mandates fail because they often ignore the history, passion, and qualities of an incumbent staff, choosing instead to import reforms that are both generic and popular. Lambert views leadership from a constuctivist perspective and considers the processes, activities, and relationships in which people engage, rather than the individual or a specific role. Finally, Lambert asserts a need to institutionalize the process of collaboration and collective responsibility, suggesting that leadership is the foundation for sustaining school and district improvements.

The National Leadership Network Study Group on Restructuring Schools (1990), suggests that restructuring is distinguished by its philosophical underpinnings (e.g., making the needed changes in schools so that America educates all its children for productive lives) and its structural or operational components. The national leadership study group further asserts fundamental changes in four key dimensions of schooling: programs and services, roles and responsibilities, rules and regulations and accountability.

These administrators participating in the study group of restructuring schools reported that leadership in schools requires attention in three key areas: student learning outcomes,

teaching and learning processes, and the integration of educational and social services. The administrators further identified the key principles and characteristics which defined their experience regarding restructuring. The six principles and characteristics were defined as:

* Risk Taking
* Communication
* Collaboration
* Local Innovation
* Professional accountability
* Professionalism
* Rejection of Conventional Stereotypes
* Flexibility and Resilience

The study group further hypothesized that skilled leadership that was insightful and sensitive as the key to initiating the change process.

Cawelti (1994), encourages school leader to consider systemic change (e.g. simultaneously restructuring of the major elements that contribute to improving the quality of instruction in the classroom). Cawelti asserted that the existence restructuring occurred in several elements; outcome based education, alternative assessment, interdisciplinary teaching, site based management, block scheduling, business and industry alliances, and through the appropriate use of technology.

Findings

Breaking Ranks is the most recent proposal for restructuring the American high school. It presents a blueprint for initiating school restructuring and provides administrative leadership with a philosophical perspective and vision for an effective high school in the 21st century. Its recommendations are the result of collaborative efforts among effective school leaders, university leaders, foundations and concerned individuals. The recommendations are representative of the best in school reform and embody the

philosophy of school reform movements of the past twenty years including; effective school reformer, the Coalition of Essential Schools, and small school reformer.

The process for restructuring involves various community constituents who collaborate in the planning of rigorous staff development activities, and a decision making process which recognize the need to increase teachers knowledge of schools in order to support high quality teaching and learning.

The results of school restructuring reform efforts implemented at Desert Mountain HS by a female administered employing recommendations articulated through a report generated by a collaboration between the Carnegie Foundation and the National Association of Secondary School Principals are mixed at this point.

The administrative leadership seeking to restructure a school in its inaugural year was in her words successful in two areas: 1) focusing depth versus breath and 2) integration in art. Her failures were both conceptual and operational. In the process of developing a professional culture; the local administrator failed to establish design teams that were bottom up driven and reflected the districts emphasis on collaboration and interdisciplinary learners (e.g.., all of the design team leaders were leaders were proponents of a traditional school and previously on staff at the same school; therefore a clearly articulated vision by teachers never occurred.

Leadership at DMHS in the two year period of time when restructuring was occurring experienced problems identified in the literature as barriers to reform including:, lack of a decentralized budget, non sustaining support from the central office, lack of accountability to the district superintendent, and lack of support from the community of teachers and parents.

Failure to secure or manage the capital budget prevented the design teams from implementing change in a rapid mode and lessened the administrators ability to provide the necessary resources to support reform. An ability to sustain central office support was attributed to the administrators inability to satisfy the community forces which were

resistant to restructuring the high school and the failure of the professional culture to adopt any discipline policy. An inability to provide data supporting the districts indicators of success in a timely manner and two changes in district leadership influenced the administrators ability to secure program approval from the superintendent position. Finally, many parents and community leaders underestimated the extent of reform as it related to their children and their view of the American high school.

In terms of programs which distinguished school reform at DMHS, the advisory program which paired individual students with an adult was abandoned after three years due to a variety of factors including: 1) grievances from the teachers association which demanded additional monies for increased student contacts, 2) inadequate resources provided by the district to support organizing teachers time differently, 3) inadequate staff development in training staff to become advocates of the advisory program, and 4) design teams which developed into top down quasi organizations versus bottom up driven organizations.

Implementation of block scheduling and allowing for a focus on depth versus depth in the curriculum and instruction survived in a modified form. At present students have the choice of taking courses in a traditional forty-five to fifty minutes block of time; or they may opt for a concentrated two hour block of instruction. New management has been assigned to management of information systems at DMHS and has had a positive impact of the efficient operation of the school.

The honors distinction program which attempted to introduce authentic assessment and desegregate the classroom setting has been lapsed as a school-wide initiative: although indiyidual groups of teachers uphold the practice. It received the harshest criticism from the proponents of a traditional segregated high school curriculum and resulted in the establishment of an International Baccalaureate (IB) program.

Implementation of the IB program and strengthening of the criteria for application of the Carnegie high school unit with the opening of school for the 98-99 academic year

reversed the loss of potential honor students and satisfied the publics demand for specialized programs for students of the wealthy and established

Conclusions

School restructuring and reform initiatives proposed by Breaking Ranks, the Coalition of Essential Skills, effective school researchers, and others are similar in their philosophical orientation which focuses on student achievement. These efforts also assert the need for visionary leadership which is collaborative and has the capacity to involve others.

The school restructuring movements also exhibit weaknesses similar to the ideals expressed in Breaking Ranks.

The weaknesses are identified as

* the recommendations are a blueprint (conceptual) and not operational, so no specific or coherent plan exist,
* cost and the allocation of resources for implementation are not addressed,
* tracking is difficult because everything must be sorted, discussed, and embodied in teacher actions before it reaches the student,
* data supporting change initiatives is not defined
* the basic systemic structure of the school has not changed.

Recommendations

In terms of recommendations it appears that there is no one best way to restructure schools; however it is apparent that the salient criteria for implementing school reform is a question of leadership. Administrative leadership must be able to demonstrate an ability to create a school culture (environment) which engages the teacher and learner, and focuses the entire education enterprise on student development and achievement.

A transformational leadership style which is caring, promotes collaboration and a common vision within in schools and communities to deliver services to diverse student population with varying learning styles offers the best opportunity for school reform.

In summary, school reform or restructuring is an exercise in change process. School leaders must learn how to plan and manage change and do it in the face of a rapidly changing world. Some contemporary organizations are reconcepualizing their planning process as learning opportunities and view the benefits of planning beyond the mission and vision, the objectives and strategies, the outcomes and the assessments that emerge from the process but also the learning that occurs during the process.

And finally, I support the conclusions of the Coleman report which identify the family as contributing roughly half of a students achievement, and further agree that the essential characteristic in a schools environment is related to a type of personalization comparable to familial eclogies. However I reject the argument that schools are incapable of helping all students succeed.

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